

Black Dust: Raymond Queneau and *The Encyclopedia of the Inexact Sciences*

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‘I am the author of the *Encyclopedia of The Inexact Sciences* (...) For long years
my mind has wandered along strange paths.’¹

Over the course of Raymond Queneau’s *Children of Clay* (*Les Enfants du limon*) a work of scholarship is being undertaken by one of the novel’s characters, having enlisted the help of another, extracts from which appear at first intermittently, then with increasing frequency, and finally at a length that leads to a prolonged suspension of the narrative that contains them. Whether this material takes the form of a transcription drawn from the unwieldy repository of preparatory notes whose gradual systematization accompanies the novel’s own progress, or whether it is conveyed through a character’s direct speech, somewhat improbably given its length, and for this reason tending to test the patience of whoever finds themselves listening to an expatiation so protracted it can cause the narrative setting to fade away entirely, in either case this material is notable for being of a markedly different discursive order to the fiction it intervenes in: above all, because it has been culled from publications that have a real existence beyond the imaginary confines of the novel. As a post-script makes clear to the reader, these documents are ‘*naturally authentic*’ (CC, 425; II, 912; emphasis in original). Queneau is not their author (at least in any conventional sense) and literature is not their context (at least to begin with), a circumstance that leaves the structural unity of the novel in a state of carefully cultivated eccentricity, to the point that the formal cohesion of the work can find itself placed under significant strain. Of course there is nothing inadvertent in the application of this pressure.

The novel is an instance of what Roland Barthes refers to as the ‘controlled destruction’ that literature undergoes in Queneau’s hands, the enigma of which is that this is undertaken not in opposition to but in complicity with what stands to be destroyed.² The gesture remains in keeping with the author’s commitment to a ‘practice of prose’ that never stops seeking to extend the existing inventory of possibilities specific to literature, the sum total of its potential manifestations, the range and arrangement of attributes it is considered capable of bearing. *What can the literary work be made to do, what can it be made to undergo, and still be called literature?* Among the many and varied experiments in technique undertaken by Queneau in response to this question, *Children of Clay* holds a place of its own within his oeuvre for what he grants himself ‘permission’ to undertake there.³

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What the presence of this documentation within the novel first demonstrates, then, over and above any consideration of its actual content, is a capacity on literature’s part to open itself up to other discursive forms, displacing its limits ever outwards in a movement that may well distinguish it above all else. The singular nature of this prerogative is what informs the peculiarity of its institution: whatever lies beyond literature’s scope, the non-literary in all its variations, can be made, by literature, *to signify literarily*, so to speak. Accommodating an irreducibly extrinsic element in no way compromises a literary work’s intrinsic structure. Perhaps the converse is even the case, as Jacques Derrida insists on more than one occasion when addressing this context: ‘But is it not necessary,’ he writes, ‘for all literature to exceed literature? [*Mais n’y a-t-il pas lieu, pour toute littérature, de déborder la littérature?*] What would be a literature that would be only what it is, literature? It would no longer be itself if it were itself.’²⁴ This is why what he elsewhere calls ‘literarity’ should be considered less ‘an intrinsic property of this or that discursive event,’ than a ‘function’ which in practice shows itself to be inherently ‘unstable.’ Since it never encounters a restriction to its field of application, it can never be put to proper use. It has no definitive form since there is no

form that it cannot make its own. Derrida, once more (he is writing in ‘Demeure: Fiction and Testimony’):

One can read the same text – which thus never exists ‘in itself’ – as a testimony that is said to be serious and authentic, or as an archive, or as a document, or as a symptom – or as a work of literary fiction, indeed the work of a literary fiction that simulates all of the positions that we have just enumerated. For literature can say anything, accept anything, receive anything, suffer anything, and simulate everything.⁵

And yet, whilst this ultimately renders the line of demarcation between literature and its contrary indeterminable – to the extent that Derrida will venture to say here, ‘There is no essence or substance of literature: literature is not. It does not exist’ (*D*, 28) – nevertheless, the distinction between the two orders is not for all that simply abandoned. The threshold running between them may be un-locatable, but without it the movement through which literature approaches itself, by surpassing itself, would hardly be possible. One *oeuvre* can develop a response to this antinomy, another can remain entirely indifferent to it, but in either case it persists there, necessarily, whether surreptitiously or in plain sight.

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Children of Clay exemplifies this situation on account of the extra-literary documentation it harbors, and the ways in which the book within a book that this engenders relates to the novel that frames it. The fictional author under whose tutelage this material appears, a Monsieur Chambernac, has set out to codify a canon of nineteenth century writings in the French language that are notable for being penned by ‘*fous littéraires*’ (‘literary lunatics’ is how Madeleine Velguth, the novel’s translator, renders this term for the English reader). ‘At once a biography, a bibliography and an anthology’ of the authors in question (*CC*, 77;

II, 660), this effort, his life's work, will culminate in what he eventually settles on calling *The Encyclopedia of the Inexact Sciences*. The criterion on which the work is founded is notable for its rigour, but it will also be responsible for precipitating a series of paradoxical effects across the resulting canon. What, then, does the designation '*fou littéraire*' refer to? Despite first appearances, the classification introduced here does not rest primarily on psychological categories – “I don't want to do either psychoanalysis or psychiatry,” says Chambernac (CC, 396; II, 891) – still less is it a judgment pitched against unreason, in reason's name. A work is *fou* not simply because it is apparently lacking in sense. It may well harbor all manner of demonstrable inconsistencies and fallacies, perhaps outright delusions, and this may deprive it of even passing adequation with its stated object, but this is not the primary reason it has been qualified as such. “It's not a question of truth or insanity [*folie*],” Chambernac is quick to clarify when this suggestion is put to him (CC, 170; II, 727), and this explains why any kind of hermeneutic programme, guided by these or other values, is conscientiously absent from *The Encyclopedia*. Understanding has no role to play in this endeavour. “I did not set out, in this book, to understand nor to explain, let's say, the ravings of our authors. My work is purely enumerative, descriptive, selective. Moreover, who understands madness? No one” (CC, 218; II, 762).

What is instead at stake for Chambernac, this becoming ever more apparent as the novel progresses, is a certain kind of discursive operation, one that only becomes discernible through a highly particular set of circumstances, which it itself engenders. A work may be designated *fou* when its thesis proves to be so atypical that it opens up an unbridgeable expanse between itself and every other conceivable set of thematically related discursive statements, meaning it cannot be placed in relation to the standards of its given field. Said otherwise, the discourse placed into circulation by a *fou littéraire* is such that it forecloses all possible response. In the novel's *prière d'insérer*, written by Queneau himself, this is presented as a ‘problem of *recognition*’: *The Encyclopedia* is comprised of writings that

‘were never recognized as valid, by even a single *other* individual’ (CC, 10; II, 1592; emphases in original). If the standpoint adopted by a *fou littéraire* does not allow itself to be communicated with, nor can it be taken up by anyone else. It remains, in contravention of its author’s intention, the preserve of the author alone, and this is the schema on which any subsequent definition of *folie* will ultimately depend: “Madness is the self-deification of an individual entity in which no collective entity will recognize itself” (CC, 396; II, 891). This is why a work derived from this standpoint necessarily finds itself situated ‘on the borders of darkness’ (*The Encyclopedia’s* subtitle (173; II, 730)).⁶

Having presented a choice extract from one of the *fous littéraires*, and having been met with inevitable bemusement – ‘Reader and listeners, uncomfortable, stare stupidly at one another’ (CC, 168; II, 726) – Chambernac will offer a definitive explanation of the principle determining admittance to *The Encyclopedia*. The *fou littéraire* is

‘a published author whose wild imaginings [*élucubrations*] (I’m not using this term pejoratively) diverge from all those professed by the society in which he lives, either by this society as a whole, or by the different groups, even the minor ones, that compose it, are not related to earlier doctrines and in addition weren’t taken up by anyone else. *In short, a “literary lunatic” has neither masters nor disciples.*’ (CC, 171; II, 728; my emphasis)

For a work to merit inclusion in *The Encyclopedia* it must begin and end with itself. As the first and last of its kind, it comes from nowhere and returns there too, *having nevertheless offered itself to be read* (hence the insistence that the work be published). Not only has it enacted a break with all that comes before it, so that it cannot be placed within a lineage of any kind, just as crucially, it must be demonstrably without consequence. The ‘working hypothesis’ guiding Chambernac’s efforts underscores this point: “A ‘literary lunatic’ finds no echo” (CC, 329; II, 843). A *texte fou* is unable to form a precedent for anything else, and that it remains closed in on itself in this way is what confers upon it its particular form

of singularity (a locked room the key for which must have gone missing). On each occasion that the reader of *Children of Clay* is brought into contact with this material, regardless of the form that it takes or the content it conveys, it must always be borne in mind that it appears there as a representative of this highly idiosyncratic discursive event (idiosyncratic to the extent that, without Queneau's post-script confirming the *authenticity* of these texts, the reader could well be inclined to treat them as yet another contrivance of the fiction). All this means that the contours of this event remain indiscernible so long as the wider conditions informing its particular 'modes of existence' remain unaccounted for. A standpoint can be designated *fou* only in view of these conditions, which makes Queneau's character a proponent of that type of discourse analysis called for by Foucault in 'What Is an Author?':

Perhaps the time has come to study not only the expressive value and formal transformations of discourse, but its modes of existence: the modifications and variations, within any culture, of modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation. Partially at the expense of themes and concepts that an author places in his work, the 'author-function' could also reveal the manner in which discourse is articulated on the basis of social relationships.⁷

As Chambernac's definition makes clear, such relationships are integral to determining the instance of discourse in question ('wild imaginings (...) [that] diverge from all those professed by the society in which he lives'). This divergence is only established by considering the conditions under which a work has been produced and the nature of its subsequent reception, which is why the *texte fou* is always framed by the network of institutional contexts through it has passed, without having been assimilated. The *Bibliothèque nationale*; the *Académie des sciences*; the publishing house; the private collection: these are some of the institutions whose respective codes must be studied in order for Chambernac to bring his project to fruition.⁸

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‘A “literary lunatic” has neither masters nor disciples.’ Inasmuch as the canon of writings founded on this principle is comprised exclusively of *sui generis* cases, works that are ‘inordinately odd’ or ‘excessively singular’ (*excessivement singulières*) (CC, 171; II, 728,) that are without generic form, then the series it gives rise to must be understood as essentially disjunctive in nature. No doubt the various cases gathered together under this criterion can be said to form an order of sorts. Thematically speaking, they show themselves circling around a similar set of interests, from squaring the circle to cosmology, linguistics to history, and ultimately Chambernac will organize the final work under sub-headings that reflect this: The Circle, The World, The Verb, Time (CC, 173–4; II, 730). And yet whether or not two works are related thematically has no bearing whatsoever on their fundamental incommensurability. Each of these ‘sciences’ remains incompatible with one another, nothing can be communicated from one to the next, their respective divergences from a given order do not cast them into a shared space.⁹ This is why, in a later article that begins by looking back on the principle underwriting *The Encyclopedia*, Queneau suggests that the term *hétéroclites* may in fact have been preferable to *fous littéraires*,¹⁰ and here it is worth recalling Foucault’s engagement with the same concept, along with the prominence it plays in his understanding of another aporetic system of classification, the ‘Chinese Encyclopedia’ of Borges.¹¹ The heteroclite, Foucault writes in the Preface to *The Order of Things*, pertains to a ‘disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately, without law or geometry’: ‘in such a state, things are “laid,” “placed,” “arranged” in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all.’¹² This is precisely how *The Encyclopedia* would have to house its individual entries: a compendium of ‘excessively singular’ fragments in the absence of a ‘*common locus*’ that would mitigate their difference. It may well be that it is this particular structural feature of *The Encyclopedia* that brings it into explicit

contravention with its own form. In a short reflection prompted by the initial appearance of the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade* (a project which was of course under the stewardship of Queneau himself), Maurice Blanchot argues that what is characteristic of any such a system of knowledge is its circularity – ‘circular knowledge is the justification of any encyclopedia’ – and that this circularity is discernible less by its shape than by its movement: an open-ended and uninterrupted motion, ‘a kind of interior becoming,’ Blanchot writes.¹³ If this is indeed the case, then the nature of the material housed within *The Encyclopedia of Inexact Sciences* stops short this circular motion at every prospective turn. From one *hétéroclite* to another, there is no conceivable means of passage, leaving this movement, since it cannot be stilled altogether, turning upon itself with nowhere else to go.¹⁴

‘A “literary lunatic” has neither masters nor disciples.’ If this is the principle on which *The Encyclopedia* is founded, then at the same time it leaves the resulting compendium in an inherently unstable state. An individual work acquires its place within *The Encyclopedia* only insofar as it persists in ‘isolation and obscurity’ (CC, 329; II, 843). Were it to find itself finally engaged with, the conditions for its inclusion would be categorically revoked. This is the sense in which the designation *fou* must be recognized as constitutively precarious by whoever uses it. It can never be ascribed to a work once and for all.

‘But then a literary lunatic can stop being one,’ said Astolphe.

‘Naturally. All he must do is eventually find admirers, I mean: sincere ones.’ (CC, 171; II, 728)

Clearly, then, *The Encyclopedia* is subject to a double bind. It cannot help precipitating the circumstances that would see it progressively deprived of its own content, by drawing its entries out of the ‘isolation and obscurity’ on which their place within the work depends. Chambernac’s efforts are apparently destined to cancel themselves out, making *The Encyclopedia* at core a self-annulling enterprise. The point is made with eloquence by ‘the poor devil’ Purpulan, Chambernac’s assistant, who, because he has been coopted into this

thankless endeavour against his own will, takes a certain satisfaction in pointing out the contradiction:

‘Have you considered, Monsieur Chambernac, that all these lunatics who thought they were geniuses and wanted glory and remain unknown, are going to come out of obscurity when your *Encyclopedia* is published: thanks to you, their names will receive some luster and go down to posterity (...). On the other hand (...) from the moment these “literary lunatics” become – thanks to you – known, by that very fact they’ll stop being “literary lunatics,” since – thanks also to you – they’ll acquire that renown the lack of which permitted them to appear in the *Encyclopedia*. Don’t you think, Monsieur Chambernac, that there’s a sort of contradiction there?’ (CC, 233; II, 773–4)

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In spite of all this *The Encyclopedia* will eventually be completed. It will become, moreover, at least for a time, an inadvertent monument to the canon it has sought to establish. How so? Because the response to Chambernac’s finished work is unanimous: no one can be made to acknowledge its worth. Having been rejected by every publisher it is shown to, it appears ‘destined to remain unknown’ (CC, 406; II, 898), and this sees it unwittingly begin to resemble the very instance of discourse it has devoted itself to, as though it had started to converge with its own object (on account of the comprehensive survey of the subject that its form demands, *The Encyclopedia* would have to become an entry in its own index): ‘by putting into circulation a book which met only with indifference he thus risked joining in his turn the category of “literary lunatics”’ (CC, 420; II, 909).

And yet an additional episode lies in store for *The Encyclopedia* that will see its fate recast a final time. Chambernac’s parting appearance in *Children of Clay* – the subject of the novel’s penultimate chapter – is marked by an encounter. By this stage he has abandoned whatever ambitions he once had for the work, has accepted the universal verdict passed

on it – “a useless book,” he concedes (CC, 422; II, 910) – and is entirely at peace with the dereliction into which it has fallen. So when by chance he finds himself in the company of someone who, unbeknown to him, has apparently been following his travails – “We’ve met several times,” said the stranger; “in the offices of the NRF, at Paulhan’s and in the offices of Denoël” (CC, 421; II, 910) – and who has furthermore developed something of an interest in the enterprise, this belated recognition is not experienced as the deliverance from oblivion it once would have been, because the whole affair now lies behind him as something no longer concerning him. Once it becomes clear that the interest shown by this newly made acquaintance is not superficial, it occurs to Chambernac that he could hand over the manuscript, and this he does, happily forfeiting any claim to authorship or ownership over the work. The grateful recipient of this gift, initially unnamed, is quickly revealed to be a writer himself and he has definite plans for the work now in his possession. If there aren’t any objections – there aren’t – he is keen to attribute *The Encyclopedia* to one of the characters in a novel he is currently writing. A brief biography of the individual in question confirms what the reader has already understood: the character is Chambernac (who is not in the least perturbed to hear details from his life recounted back to him by someone he has only just met); the stranger that Chambernac is gifting *The Encyclopedia* to is a Monsieur Queneau; and the novel being written by this Queneau is the one that the reader is now on the point of finishing. That *The Encyclopedia* changes hands in this way, passing across the threshold between fiction and reality, is not one episode among others in the narrative but the conceit on which the novel as a whole depends. Its transfer precipitates the chain of events by which the work has eventually been brought before its reader.

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Yet matters are complicated still further when the external circumstances surrounding Queneau’s work on the novel are taken into consideration. Chambernac’s plight as

recounted by the narrative is not simply a fictional invention, but modeled directly on an episode from the author's own life. Before writing commenced on *Children of Clay*, Queneau had in fact assembled an anthology of *fous littéraires* in reality, the outcome of several years spent searching amongst the 'poussière noire' (black dust) of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, as he later recalls.¹⁵ (*Black dust*: would this not ultimately be the distinguishing trait of the instance of discourse in question? A supplementary mark of obfuscation borne by each *texte fou*, extrinsic yet essential, the physical evidence of the shadow life it has been condemned to undergo in the absence of recognition.) On completion the anthology was intended to stand as a discrete publication in and of itself, but the seven hundred page manuscript that this research gave rise to (as well as the canon it singlehandedly constituted) did indeed prove to be 'unpublishable' (*LNF*, 168), rejected by both Gallimard and Denoël when it was submitted to them in 1934. (This is why in the novel Queneau has 'Queneau' cross paths with Chambernac at the offices of these same publishers: the character's failure is confirmed as the mirror image of the author's own.) Following in the wake of this rejection (albeit not directly, more than one novel is completed in the interim), *Children of Clay* was undertaken in no small part with a view to salvaging the shunned work. In Queneau's own words, it was conceived as a means of securing the circulation of *The Encyclopedia*, or at least an abridged version, in 'a disguised form' (*COD*, 120).

What this incident underscores, then, whether the frame through which it is viewed is taken from within the world of the novel or the external reality beyond it, is the fundamental role that literature will have played in granting this 'unpublishable' material the opportunity it had otherwise been denied. An instance of discourse that cannot be countenanced in and of itself meets with no resistance once re-inscribed within the literary text. (To reiterate: 'For literature can say anything, accept anything, receive anything, suffer anything, and simulate everything' (*D*, 29)). Even so, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that the discursive event in question has been made any more amenable to

publication. The fiction built to house *The Encyclopedia* is not a work of domestication and it does not bring the discursive position of the *fou littéraire* into the realm of comprehensibility. Rather, the ‘excessively singular’ nature of each *texte fou* remains inviolate, its ‘inordinate oddity’ undiminished, and it is in this sense that the novel can be said to have concretely expanded literature’s reach, going so far as to make it speak with a voice the essence of which is to remain unheard.

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In 1938, the year that *Children of Clay* was published, Gallimard having eventually accepted *The Encyclopedia* in ‘disguised form,’ Queneau was hired as a reader of manuscripts by the same publishing house. As he himself notes of the role, despite its manifest contribution to the process by which one work comes to be received as literature whilst another does not, the position is little acknowledged in the study of the latter’s conditions and conventions, to the extent that it could be said to constitute something of a blind spot within the field of literary studies: ‘It seems odd, while we’re on this subject, that literary history has never considered the role played by this particularly active critic’ (*LNF*, 102). Perhaps because the role is presumed to lie at too far a remove from literature’s purported source, perhaps because it is taken to serve a set of interests that are not exclusively literature’s own. In any case, these are not suppositions shared by Queneau. For him the hired reader’s work is not of marginal importance and is in fact misconstrued when treated as a simple subsidiary to that of the author. It should be valued in its own right for the discrete perspective it affords onto literature’s institution. This is not all. It could conceivably be used as yet a further means of interrogating the range of possibilities specific to literature. It is with this in mind that Queneau comes to envisage an undertaking every bit as eccentric as *The Encyclopedia*, on a scale that is, remarkably, even more audacious, and which shows that the ‘practice of prose’ need not necessarily have the author as its primary point of reference.

The idea is not Queneau's alone. Mention is made of it just as frequently by Jean Paulhan, who also does so drawing on his extensive experience as a reader for the publishing house in question. However difficult it is to envisage that the proposal was ever the subject of serious consideration by Gallimard, for reasons that will soon become obvious, one can nevertheless say that this small contingent of the editorial board were not only attached to the idea in principle, but were willing to defend it in spite of, perhaps because of, its fundamental unfeasibility.¹⁶ Here is how Paulhan first describes the idea:

I've never stopped proposing to Gaston Gallimard (...) that he should publish in one big volume, say towards the end of December, all the manuscripts refused during the year. I think that this would be an excellent measure, which would lend itself to a thousand interesting observations, would furnish critics and historians with first-rate documentation (without going into the mistakes I may very well have made), and would show, above all, how literary modes which we have stupidly forgotten continue to lead, quite close to us, an underhand, unskillful life.¹⁷

Whatever found itself included in this prospective anthology would thereby acquire a particularly unusual discursive status. In circumstances that are unique, perhaps even unprecedented, refusal would be the very thing that granted a work its place within the field of literature, having been published in contravention of the judgment passed on it, the hired reader's verdict not abandoned outright but purposely inverted. Since nothing that had put itself forward for consideration would be excluded, the perimeters delimiting the field, rather than being done away with altogether, would instead be rendered absolutely pervious. They would, after all, continue to encompass something called literature, but they would no longer have an enclosing function, and the very least that could be expected from this proposal would therefore be a dramatic expansion in the quantity of works in circulation. Elsewhere, in a conversation with Marguerite Duras,

Paulhan suggests that such a collection would have to be printed on bible paper to have any hope of cohering as a single volume, given the sheer number of works it would have to accommodate.¹⁸ But the question is not simply one of scale. Elsewhere still, Paulhan goes so far as to imply that the existence of this book could potentially reconfigure what is customarily expected of the work of literature in general. An anthology of rejected works, he reiterates, ‘would include all kinds of unique things’:

A good writer will most likely show us only himself. But a mediocre writer may show us all men, their needs, by way of myths and tales. We certainly don’t lack personal expressions of viewpoint. We are overrun with them, smothered by them. Besides, nothing human should be neglected, and we would call this one-copy book *The Sunday Writers*.¹⁹

Were the provisions ever made for this book to be published, establishing a forum in which writing became the prerogative of anyone – because of *no one in particular* – would this not imply a fundamental change in the accepted form of the author-function? Once the written *oeuvre* offered itself as something other than an expression of individuation, would it not disrupt the distribution of values on which the application of this function depends? Perhaps what comes into view with this proposal is an intimation of the different future envisaged for ‘literature’ at the close of ‘What Is an Author?’ ‘We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity’ (*WA*, 138). *The Sunday Writers* would be a first rehearsal for a writing practice characterized by this kind of impersonality. And what animates this exercise is the paradoxical intuition that the text judged to be without merit harbors something that the distinguished *oeuvre* it loses out to is lacking. As Paulhan insists, not only does this discarded text have a certain value, making the generic in its own way ‘unique’, it derives this value not in spite of its genericity but because of it.

Now when Queneau takes up the idea in question – he is writing in 1944, having become General Secretary at Gallimard in 1941 – his own particular emphasis lays bare another set of implications in turn.

[The] ‘openness’ of the writer’s profession would be made complete if everyone had the right to find his way into print, a right that is after all a corollary of the right to free speech. *It would be interesting to publish everything.* It’s difficult to see why every man shouldn’t be able to avail himself of every available means of expression – to make a film, for example, if he likes, even (and especially) if he lacks the millions of francs such a project requires. (*LNF*, 102; my emphasis.)

‘To publish everything’ is conceived here by the author as an exercise the concern of which is not simply *what* would be written, whatever this may be, but *that* it would be written from a standpoint which could be made use of by anyone, its facility extended universally and wielded unconditionally. With this appeal to the language of right (*droit*), the practice of literature envisaged here finds itself converging with another, that of politics. It would thereby throw into relief the circumstances that, for Derrida at least, distinguish literature from all other discursive forms:

Literature is a modern invention, inscribed in conventions and institutions which, to hold on to just this trait, secures in principle its *right to say everything*. Literature thus ties its destiny to a certain non-censure, to the space of democratic freedom (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.) No democracy without literature; no literature without democracy.²⁰

As much a political endeavour as it is a literary one, then, ‘to publish everything’ would constitute an unparalleled effort in this direction. And even though unrealized, even if unrealizable, this would arguably make the proposal one of Queneau’s most far-reaching engagements with literature’s potential. By making the right to say everything the prerogative of everyone it would place the practice of literature under a different horizon,

bringing into view a literary culture that would be difficult to reconcile with the disposition of values, functions and uses through which its practice would have otherwise continued to pass. (To take just one example: what would it mean that the public associated with this culture would no longer be exclusively, or even primarily, a *reading* public but a *writing* public?) The 'book' that would hold this vast panoply of writing, drawing upon 'every available means of expression,' and forged through an intervention in the very conditions by which a work acquires its status as literature, this book could be considered a companion piece to *The Encyclopedia of Inexact Sciences*. Both concern a form of discourse defined by its lack of recognition, by the failure to acquire a place within the field it purports to belong to. Certainly their respective orientations are far apart, if not categorically opposed. Whilst the heteroclitite is the purveyor of something 'excessively singular,' the Sunday writer's output is characterized by a generality or a genericity that cannot be further qualified. And yet from the perspective of Queneau's practice of prose they find themselves in alignment, each standpoint a means of extending the given set of frames available to a literary work, the types of discourse it can support, the uses to which it can be put, in each case reconfiguring the relation that literature has with its own limits.

NOTES

¹ Raymond Queneau, *Children of Clay*, translated by Madeleine Velguth (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1998), 413; Raymond Queneau, *Œuvres complètes*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 904. Hereafter references to the novel appear as *CC*, the first citation is to the English translation, the second to the French original.

² Roland Barthes, 'Zazie and Literature,' in *Critical Essays*, translated by Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 117.

³ This idiom is Julien Gracq's (who has Proust in mind when he writes): 'All the conquests, all the successes of power in art were not inventions but permissions, the rights of

transgression that an artist suddenly accorded himself at the expense of the *not-dared* until then.’ Julien Gracq, *Reading Writing*, translated by Jeanine Herman (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2006), 118.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, ‘Before the Law,’ translated by Avital Ronell in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 215.

⁵ Maurice Blanchot; Jacques Derrida, *The Instant of my Death, Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 29. Henceforward *D*.

⁶ It is with these circumstances in mind that Jordan Stump refers to ‘the cruel economy of the name’ to which the *fou littéraire* is subject: in each case the desire for recognition, to make a name for oneself, leads to inevitable obscurity. See *Naming and Unnaming: On Raymond Queneau* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 103–19.

⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’ in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 137. Hereafter *WA*.

⁸ And what of the asylum, since the question here is one of ‘madness’? Certainly this is an institution that must be acknowledged by any analysis of the discourse in question, but as Chambernac explains, its direct influence is limited: ‘I’m calling “literary lunatic” an author – a published author, that’s essential (...) Because it proves that he still has enough social adaptability to keep from being institutionalized and to put out a book, which is, I believe, a fairly complex activity’ (*CC*, 170–1; *II*, 728).

⁹ Drawing on a different theoretical register, that of Bahktin, Evert van der Starre makes an analogous point in his study of *The Encyclopedia*: ‘*Les Enfants du Limon* pushes novelistic polyphony to the extreme (...). In *Les Enfants du Limon* this “decentralization” and this absence of a “fixed place” [the key features of the polyphonic tendency at stake here] are particularly apparent when it comes to the precise meaning of the expression “*les fous*’

littéraires.” Michel Foucault taught us that each era has a particular conception of madness. Now, Queneau’s novel does not propose one single definition, but several.’ See *Curiosités de Raymond Queneau: de l’Encyclopédie des Sciences inexactes’ aux jeux de la création romanesque* (Geneva: Droz, 2006), 69–70 (my translation).

¹⁰ Raymond Queneau, *Letters, Numbers, Forms: Essays, 1928-70*, translated by Jordan Stump (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 168. Hereafter *LNF*.

¹¹ The structural correspondence between the two encyclopedias is also alluded to by Allen Thiher in his reading of *Children of Clay*, although without mention of the category that interests us here. See *Raymond Queneau* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 86–7.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1989), xvii–xviii.

¹³ Maurice Blanchot, ‘The Time of Encyclopedias,’ in *Friendship*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 50.

¹⁴ For a detailed treatment of the ‘encyclopedic urge’ informing Queneau’s work, the desire to see all, see Jane Alison Hale, *The Lyric Encyclopedia of Raymond Queneau* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), in particular ‘Raymond Queneau, Encyclopedist,’ 9–35.

¹⁵ Raymond Queneau, ‘*Comment on devient encyclopédiste,*’ in *Bords: Mathématiciens, précurseurs, encyclopédistes* (Paris: Hermann, 1978), 120. Hereafter *COD*.

¹⁶ A detailed account of the workings of the Gallimard editorial board in this period can be found in Pierre Assouline’s biography of the publisher: see *Gaston Gallimard: A Half-Century of French Publishing*, translated by Harold J. Salemson (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988), 85ff. On Paulhan’s editorial work as a literary practice in its own right, see Martyn Cornick, ‘Jean Paulhan and the “*Nouvelle revue française*”: Literature, Politics, and the Power of Creative Editorship,’ in *Yale French Studies* 106 (2004), 37–53; and Brigitte Ouvry-Vial, ‘The Double Necessity of Criticism and Self-Effacement: Paulhan and

Fénéon,' translated by Michael Syrotinski and Martyn Cornick, in the same volume, 26–36.

¹⁷ Jean Paulhan, 'Postscript,' in Noël Devaulx, *The Tailor's Cake*, translated by Betty Askwith (London: Allan Wingate, 1946), 103–4.

¹⁸ Marguerite Duras, 'Jean Paulhan, Reading Manuscripts,' in *Green Eyes*, translated by Carol Barko (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 112. Duras tells us here that for the two hundred novels published annually by Gallimard, ten thousand are rejected, and Paulhan does not dispute these figures (114). This makes the anthology begin to resemble that remarkable object with which Borges's *The Library of Babel* concludes, the *vade mecum* that, with its 'infinite number of infinitely thin leaves,' contains within its covers the entirety of the Library (the latter itself housing all possible books). Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*, edited by Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 88.

¹⁹ Paulhan, quoted in Assouline, *Gaston Gallimard*, 94.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"' in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, edited by David Wood (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 23. In fact the co-implication of these two spheres of engagement is no less discernible in the work of Paulhan, albeit handled in a different way: just as the Sunday writer is uniquely valuable for showing, not himself, but what is common to everyone, so politics should find its orientation on the basis of *le premier venu*, the first one called upon, whoever this may be. True, democracy for Paulhan above all concerns the individual – this is 'where the event comes to pass' – but only insofar as this individual is indistinguishable from any other, shorn of all discernible traits: this is the central theme of a text from 1939, 'Democracy Calls on the First to Come Along' (*La démocratie fait appel au premier venu*), translated by Jennifer Bajorek, in *On Poetry and Politics*, edited by Jennifer Bajorek and Eric Trudel (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 104–5.